Samaná English: A Dialect That Time Forgot
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Samaná English is spoken by descendants of "free" black Americans who settled over 150 years ago in what is now the Dominican Republic. The fact that the dialect has survived until now in a virtually monolingual Spanish-speaking nation is attributed mainly to the isolation of most remaining speakers on the sparsely-populated Samaná peninsula. The assumption that language change is retarded by isolation invites speculation that Samaná English is representative of the speech of "free" Afro-Americans around 1824, when the first American immigrants set foot on Hispaniola.

1. Background of the present study.

Published information on the English-speaking black Dominicans is hard to find. General texts on the Dominican Republic offer a paragraph at most, confirming the group's existence and its location on the Samaná peninsula, but giving few additional details. The most thorough existing study is an article by H. Hoetink entitled "Americans in Samaná" based on data he collected during a 1962 visit to the Dominican Republic. It incorporates the findings of a Commission of Inquiry from the United States which visited Samaná in 1870.

Hoetink's article was published at a time when I was serving as a Peace Corps Volunteer in the Dominican Republic, and I first heard of the English-speaking colony through lectures by Hoetink on Dominican history and culture, as part of my Peace Corps training at the Institute of Caribbean Studies, University of Puerto Rico. During my Peace Corps service I met several English-speaking black Dominicans and made one unsuccessful attempt to reach Samaná by driving eastward from Santo Domingo to Sabana del Mar, on the southern shore of the Bay of Samaná; but failing an attempt to cross the bay on a fishing boat.

In 1979, enroute to a Conference on Theoretical Orientations in Creole Studies in Saint Thomas I stopped briefly in the Dominican Republic and succeeded in reaching Samaná by land: driving north to Puerto Plata and eastward along the northern coast onto the peninsula.

Once in Samaná, I had no difficulty finding English speakers, but Spanish appeared to be the usual language of public interaction. I spoke at length with two adult males (ages 70, 40) who supplied most of the data upon which the following analysis is based.

2. Historical background.

The Haitian Revolution played a key role in the events which resulted in the emigration from North America of the group from which the present speakers of Samaná English are descended. On the one hand it produced a favorable political situation for the settlement of former American slaves on Hispaniola; and on the other hand it served as a beacon of hope and political rallying point for the American freedmen, many of whom identified strongly with Africa and saw eventual repatriation to their lost homeland (or settlement in a newly-independent country such as Haiti) as preferable to permanent residence in North America.

A vivid synopsis of the situation confronted by "free" Africans during the early years of the Republic is given by John Henrik Clark (1974). Tracing the recurrence of the "back to Africa" theme in Afro-American history, he observes that

> "During the eighteenth century there was strong agitation among certain groups of Black people in America for a return to Africa. This agitation was found mainly among groups of 'free Negroes' because of the uncertainty of their position as freed men in a slave holding society . . . (xvii)"

As early as 1788 a proposal for a "general exodus to Africa on the part of at least free Negroes (DuBois, 1940)" was transmitted by the Negro Union of Newport, Rhode Island to the Free African Society of Philadelphia.

At roughly the same time, the western third of the island of Hispaniola was about to embark upon the world shaking series of events summarized as follows by C. L. R. James (1963):

> "In August 1791, after two years of the French Revolution and its repercussions in San Domingo, the slaves revolted. The struggle lasted for 12 years. The slaves defeated in turn the local whites and the soldiers of the French monarchy, a Spanish invasion, a British expedition of some 60,000 men, and a French expedition of similar size under Bonaparte's brother-in-law. The defeat of Bonaparte's expedition in 1803 resulted in the establishment of the Negro state of Haiti which has lasted to this day (ix)."

One measure of the impact of the Haitian revolution upon the lives of "free" North American blacks is the fact that advocates of black repatriation sent agents to South America and Haiti, as well as Africa (Clark op. cit. xxiv); and that a "Maryland Haytian Society" was formed in 1821 by freedmen from that state to promote the resettlement of black Americans in Haiti (Hoetink p. 6).

By 1801, Haitian forces controlled the entire island of Hispaniola but they were repelled from the Spanish side in 1909 by Spanish loyalists aided by the English fleet. In 1822, however, the Haitians, under General Jean Pierre Boyer, once again occupied Santo Domingo and ruled the entire island until 1844 when the Dominican Republic attained national independence.

The migration of large numbers of American freedmen to Hispaniola is thought to be the result of efforts of one Johnathan Granville who was sent to New York in 1824 as an agent of the Boyer government, authorized to promise prospective settlers free passage, four months of support, and thirty six acres of land to every twelve workers (Hoetink, op. cit.).

3. The original settlers.

My research has produced no better estimate of the numbers and time of arrival of the original settlers than Hoetink's guess of six to thirteen thousand, the first boatload of whom arrived in Santo Domingo City on November 29, 1824. Hoetink's estimation of the number of settlers is based in part on documents showing that the agent Granville was authorized to bring 6,000 immigrants to "Spanish Haiti" of whom 200 were to be placed in Samaná "to produce various fruits" (ibid.).

The 1870 Commission of Inquiry found a thriving colony of five to six hundred souls, engaged mainly in farming. Most families were producing a surplus on a small fraction of sixteen acres of land that each immigrant reportedly got from the Boyer government.

The original settlers were reportedly from Philadelphia, or a nearby location such as Baltimore or New Jersey. Hoetink's informants "without exception" claimed Philadelphia as the place of origin of the first settlers. My 70-year-old informant, a lifelong Samaná resident whose parents and grandparents were born there, counts his great-grandfather among the original settlers but cannot specify the time of their arrival. He specifies their American places of origin as "Philadelphia" and "Delaware."

> "Some come from Philadelphia, some . . . from Delaware, and so we here is descendant of them."

The younger informant, when asked about the group's origins, replied:

> "In 1892 (sic.) we had a big revolution over here . . . These is slaves, you know, the Englishes brung in to fight gints the Haitians . . . and then they stayed here . . ."

The English did in fact seize Samaná in 1809, and hoisted

the Spanish flag there, in a move that forced the retreat of occupying Haitian forces to the western sector. The possible role of English speaking slaves in that struggle, some of whom may have remained as permanent Samaná residents, needs to be explored further since it is consistent with my informant's statement. If corroborated, it means that the Americans from Philadelphia and thereabout, were not the first, or only, black, English-speaking settlers on the Samaná peninsula.

4. Samaná English and Black English.

Samaná English resembles modern BE in terms of such features as absence of post-vocalic /r/; "simplification" of final consonant clusters; nonstandard usage of the verb suffix /z/; nonstandard usage of the copula/auxiliary be; and non-inversion of the subject NP and AUX in questions. Certain features, however, which occur variably in modern BE, in alternation with standard or mesolectal forms, seem to occur categorically, or nearly so, in Samaná English.

Non-realization of post-vocalic /r/, for example, is categorical in the speech of one informant (Table IB); and practically so in the other (IA); the only exception being his pronunciation of girls in a manner that seems strongly influenced by orthography.

TABLE I: r-less forms in Samaná English

Informant A		Informant B	
/hi/ ~ /hiyə/ ~ /heyə/	'here'	/ye/ ~ /hye/ ~ /hi/	'here'
/boɔn/	'born'	/bo:n/	'born'
/la:nz/	'learn'	/lʌnz/	'learn'
/ye:z/	'years'	/ye:z/	'years'
/θʌd/	'third'	/θʌdiyeyt/	'thirty-eight'
/ðeyə/ /ðæ/	'there'	/ðey/	'their'
/fa:m/	'farm'	/fa:mz/	'farms'
/owvə/	'over'	/owvə/	'over'
/fʌs/	'first'	/yandə/	'yonder'
/ha:d/	'hard'	/skye:s/	'scarce'
/sɔ:vis/	'service'	/yʌnstəz/	'youngsters'
/wʌkin/	'working'	/ča:ǰ/	'charge'
/mʌðə/	'mother'	/brʌðəz/	'brothers'
/hʌ/	'her'	/ʌndə/	'under'
/girlz/	'girls'	/kyælifonyə/	'California'

The pronunciation of 'gift' and 'host' in

Big gift shops charge a whole host of money . . . (40)

and the selection of the /iz/ allomorph of the plural suffix in the production of 'tourists' by the same informant, indicates that simplification of final consonant clusters is also a categorical

feature of his dialect. The other informant also consistently produces simplified clusters in such forms as priest, island, just, etc.

Neither informant shows any instances of NP-AUX inversion, and typically produce such questions as:

This is the first time you come here Santo Domingo? (70)
You is just givin a little walk? (70)
When you will be coming back? (40)

In modern BE, by comparison, noninversion of NP-AUX is a variable feature.

Both informants exhibit more frequent "hypercorrect" usage of the verb suffix -s than is characteristic of modern BE, eg:

Plenty people goes to the country. (40)
When we gits 'em we sell 'em to the touris'es. (40)
We speaks it bad. (70)

Both informants produce "zero" copula constructions; and both use ain't as a negator.

They scarce. (40)
We at your service. (70)
Y'all ain't going to find it. (70)
. . . when we ain't sellin' to the touris'es. (40)

Both exhibit full forms of is, am, and are, though not always with standard subject-verb agreement.

She said you is quite beautiful . . . (70)
They are lookin' now for teachers. (70)
The Chinos they is uptown. (70)
That is the name of a Indian. (40)
I am of them. (40)

Contractions of are do not occur in the data, and contracted is occurs only with the demonstrative that:

That's a island. (70)
That's the (hotel) Cayacoa. (40)

One instance of uninflected be occurs with apparent habitual meaning. The seventy year old, when asked if he had any relatives in the United States, replied:

By the radio I bees hearin' nowadays plenty family I have out from here . . . but not because I know that . . .

In all of the above characteristics of the copula system, Samaná English and BE are quite similar. The younger informant produces what appears to be the contraction I'm before the past participle been, in a manner which suggests that in his idiolect /ʌm/ is classified as a lexical variant of the subject pronoun I. In answer to the question Have you ever been to the States? he replied:

> No. I'm never been. I'm been in Porto Rico, I'm been Miami, I'm been Spain because I belong to the Navy, you know, Dominican Navy, and, I'm been in the Guantanamo base, but, uh, I'm got some brothers over there New York . . .

Previous suggestions that /a/ and /ʌm/ function in BE as variants of the first person singular pronoun (Stewart 1966; Dillard 1972) have been met with scepticism; the best known example being Labov's (1972) review of arguments for and against an underlying copula in the structure of BE sentences. The case for lexical variation rests primarily upon the fact that speakers who frequently produce "zero" variants of is and are after other pronouns normally produce I'm /ʌm/, That's /ðæ s/, it's /is/ and what's /hwʌs/ before predicate noun phrases, adjectives, locatives, Ving constructions, etc. It receives additional support from occasional observations of North American children using /ʌ m/ as a subject pronoun, e.g.: /ʌm iz ə kawboy/ 'I'm a cowboy.' Similar usage has been attested by adult speakers, i.e.: /izðæs ə fak/ 'Is that a fact?' uttered by a gentleman in his fifties or sixties in Berkeley, California in 1981. While such observations may be dismissed as typical or marginal behavior limited to a few among the very young and very old, the Samaná data provide the most solid evidence yet of the lexical alternation between I and I'm as a firmly established dialect feature.

The classification of I'm, that's, it's and what's as subject pronouns not only facilitates the description of BE as a dialect in which the copula is normally realized as "zero" after pronoun subjects: it also is supported by the intuitions of native speakers of BE. In a paper now in progress on basilectal BE and the creolist hypothesis of the origin of BE, I discuss the question of the nature of BE subject pronouns at length, taking into account the Samaná data.

The main purpose of the present paper has been to demonstrate that Samaná English resembles modern BE but appears archaic in comparison. The inference that an archaic variety of BE was spoken by the original settlers, and by their counterparts whom they left behind in Philadelphia, Baltimore and thereabouts, is consistent with the hypothesis developed in DeBose in progress; i.e.: that BE is the result of continuing decreolization of a North American basilect distinct from Gullah or "Plantation Creole" (Dillard op. cit.) which has always been highly decreolized in comparison to the English-derived creoles of West Africa and the Caribbean.

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